

Dependent Care

Child Care: Struggles with child care de-stabilize the workforce.

“Parents described child care not so much as a routine, but as an orchestra, a complicated ever-changing array of age-specific arrangements.”

Managing child care for low-income workers is anything but consistent. The cost of full time child care stretches many parents’ budgets but is beyond reach for low-income workers. As a result, they turn to family members, relatives, and others to provide care, in which providers and schedules differ from day to day. In fact, researchers find that the upheaval associated with the patchwork child care networks low-income workers cobble together can destroy their employment efforts.¹¹

Key findings from a study on low-wage workers raising families indicate that:

- Parents want to work.
- Family and child care needs were the most frequent reason parents left jobs.
- To many parents, workplace flexibility translates into whether or not their own particular boss will understand a family or health issue that might arise.

To download the full report *Keeping Jobs and Raising Families in Low-Income America: It Just Doesn’t Work*, visit www.radcliffe.edu or www.9to5.org/media.

For reference,

- **\$6,863** is the average annual cost of full time child care in Michigan.
- **\$6,500** is the average annual cost of tuition at a Michigan college.
- **300,000** children under six in Michigan have both parents in the labor force.¹²

What you can do:

- Formalize and promote flexible work schedules, where appropriate.
- Form a collaboration with your local 4C Association, which can provide child care referrals to your staff.
- If you are an employer with less than 50 employees, you are not required to follow the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), but doing so will benefit your employees.
- Implement a dependent care flexible spending account.

For more information on dependent care flexible spending accounts, please refer to *Increasing the Visibility of the Invisible Workforce: Model Programs and Policies for Hourly and Lower-Wage Employees*, a report by the Boston College Center for Work and Family which can be accessed at www.cvworkingfamilies.org.

Asset Building at Work

Dependent Care: Oakland County Government

Oakland County Government collaborated with a local child care provider to offer onsite child care to its employees. The center opens at 6:45 a.m. for an 11-hour day to accommodate staff on shift, and staff who commute to other county offices. The idea for the center arose when the county realized they were losing female staff due to child care and commuting issues. While the center is not subsidized, it is incredibly convenient for staff, accepts children at age six weeks to complement standard maternity leave, and offers educational programs on child rearing for all staff. The county considers the child care center an important retention tool.

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¹¹Dodson, Lisa, Tiffany Manuel, and Ellen Bravo. *Keeping Jobs and Raising Families in Low-Income America: It Just Doesn’t Work*. A Report of the Across the Boundaries Project. Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Harvard University. 2002.

¹²Michigan 4C Association. “Michigan 2006: A Profile of Child Care.”

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State Subsidized Child Care Assistance

The Michigan Department of Human Services Child Development and Care Program may provide payment for child care services for qualifying families when the parent, legal guardian or substitute parent is unavailable to provide the child care because of employment, education and/or because of a health/social condition for which treatment is being received. Applications are processed by the local DHS office.

The Michigan 4C (Coordinated Community Child Care) Association is the state referral network to access child care. This association refers qualifying parents to state licensed or registered child care providers.

The 4C Association offers the following services for employers:

Enhanced Referral Service

Referral counselors will help your employees find child care programs in their community and provide them with the resources needed to find the best care for their children. This process is highly individualized and focused on addressing the employee's needs. This service helps families to conduct the most effective search for a child care placement, thereby reducing leave time from the work place for investigating child care programs, and increasing stability of care for the child. This is a very cost effective benefit that serves many employees, with differing child care needs, for a low cost.

Internet Referral Service

Michigan 4C Association has an extensive, online resource to help your employees find child care. Michigan 4C Association and its 16 regional 4C offices maintain a database of more than 21,000 regulated child care programs. Employees can access this database at any time, an unlimited number of times, to find quality child care providers that will match their specific criteria.

Employer Benefits

- Decreased Absenteeism — Child care breakdowns leading to employee absences cost businesses \$3 billion annually in the United States
- Increased Productivity — 49 percent of employers report that child care services had helped boost employee productivity
- Reduced Turnover — almost 2/3 of employers found that providing child care services reduced turnover
- Recruitment Appeal — 85 percent of employers report that providing child care services improved employee recruitment

Data from various research compiled by the 4C Association — call the Association for details.

To find out more about the DHS program, visit www.michigan.gov/dhs — assistance programs — child care. Download the related brochure *Michigan Cares for Today's Child* at www.michigan.gov/dhs-publications.

To find out more about 4C's services, visit www.mi4c.org or phone 1-800-950-4171.